

20 FRANCO-GERMAN RELATIONS 1871-1914

two Imperial neighbours. She asks nothing more than to live at peace with all her neighbours. She has no interest in taking anything from any of them. On the Russian side we have already too many Poles and we certainly do not want more. On the Austrian side could we desire to annex the Czechs or the Viennese ? They would be a cause of much embarrassment. On the French side you know my opinion that we have taken too much French territory. Could we aspire to conquests at the expense of France, Belgium or Holland ? They would be recalcitrant nations. Looking all round our frontiers every gain would be a loss, every increase a cause for weakness." This was true enough, but the status quo was not good enough for France.

In the opening weeks of 1885 the news from Tonkin, which Ferry had added to the French colonial empire, became more and more alarming; but on March 29 the Premier assured the Chamber that General Negrier possessed the forces needed to hold Lang-Son and defend the frontier. On the following day a telegram announced that he had been wounded and compelled to evacuate Lang-Son by superior forces. A wave of panic and fury, unknown since *I'annee terrible*, swept over France. When the doomed Ministry demanded credits to retrieve the situation, Clemenceau sprang to his feet. " We can enter into no discussion with you. We have no longer Ministers before us but men charged with high treason, on whom the hand of the law will descend, if the principles of justice still exist." Ferry was hurled from power, peace was concluded with China, and the first period of colonial expansion of the Republic came to an abrupt end. The vote of March 30 was the condemnation not only of a French statesman but of the principle which had guided the policy of

France since the
Congress of Berlin. Gambetta and Ferry, with
the encourage-
ment of Bismarck, had sought compensation
overseas for the
loss of the provinces which, in their opinion,
could not be
regained within any measurable time; and now
the glittering
fabric of the young empire seemed to crumble
into dust. No
more colonial adventures ! No more hazardous
expeditions !
Ferry—/* *trditre, le Tonkinois*—had forgotten
the Vosges.
He had danced to Bismarck's piping and
wasted blood and
money in the far places of the earth.
AbaslePrussien! Back
to the *revanche* ! It was the hour of Clemenceau,
The atmospheric change was reflected in the
Ministerial
declarations of the Brisson Cabinet. " By a
watchful and